



Foundation for Educational Administration

## TESTIMONY

Professional Licensure and Standards Code  
N.J.A.C. 6A:9

New Jersey State Board of Education  
May 16, 2007

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My name is Dr. Eloise Forster, and I am the Director for School Leadership Programs for the Foundation for Educational Administration (FEA). Allow me to thank you for this opportunity to testify on the proposed changes to the Professional Licensure and Standards Code.

The Foundation for Educational Administration is a non-profit organization that provides professional development and support for school leaders, school districts, and professional organizations across New Jersey. In October 2002, the FEA was approved by the Department of Education as a service provider for the first non-traditional program in the state leading to principal and school administrator certification in lieu of the traditional master's degree in educational administration. This program, entitled NJ EXCEL, was implemented in January 2003 with the intent of recruiting highly qualified individuals who already held master's degrees in educational fields and would likely not pursue principal and school administrator certification if they had to complete another traditional master's degree.

As the Director who oversees the development and implementation of NJ EXCEL, I am here today on behalf of the FEA to share with you lessons that we have learned from our NJ EXCEL experiences in the hope that they may further inform the State Board's thinking as it moves forward with the proposed changes in the Professional Licensure and Standards Code.

While the FEA is in agreement with many of the proposed changes to the Code, we strongly believe that the proposed changes do not go far enough in supporting the state's efforts to strengthen both certification requirements and school leader preparation programs, and thereby increase the quality, as well as the quantity, of the school leader candidate pool. To this end, the FEA urges the State Board of Education to give serious consideration to three recommendations for inclusion in the proposed Professional Licensure and Standards Code.



## **Recommendation #1: Rigorous Criteria and Process for Non-Traditional Program Approval**

**Include rigorous criteria and procedures within the Code to direct NJDOE review and state approval of non-traditional preparation programs leading to supervisor, principal and school administrator certification. [Reference N.J.A.C. 6A:9-12.5 (j) (k) (l)]**

### **Rationale:**

We have learned many lessons during the last four years from the development and implementation of NJ EXCEL, which is grounded in nationally recommended standards and research-based training strategies for school leader preparation programs. Most important of these lessons is that a non-traditional program can provide an effective, if not superior, preparation for school leaders if its design incorporates what has repeatedly been put forth in numerous research studies, most notably the use of: research-based strategies for school leader preparation; standards-driven curriculum and performance-based assessment; intellectual and academic rigor; adult learning strategies; intensive field-based internships; support structures, and other practices that are not typically identified with traditional master's degree programs in educational administration.

The FEA can support this claim with substantial NJ EXCEL program data and an extensive external evaluation of the program conducted for the US Department of Education by the Education Alliance at Brown University, which further indicates that NJ EXCEL Program completers who obtained administrative positions were demonstrating superior levels of performance for beginning school leaders. The FEA will gladly share this information with you at your request.

The FEA believes that NJ EXCEL is proving that the research works if it is effectively applied with a commitment to a truly non-traditional design, use of research-based training strategies, and the highest quality of all program components. Fulfilling this commitment is not an easy task because it requires use of training strategies that are extremely labor intensive and demand significant resources, thus placing emphasis on quality of programs and services over revenues and profit.

In our opinion, *non-traditional means different by design*. "Non-traditional" does not mean so-called "fast track" or "accelerated" program designs that typically consist of taking existing graduate courses, with little or no change in content and instructional strategies, and condensing them into a one-year program; or providing most, if not all, of a program online to further expedite the candidate's time commitment to the learning process. We have learned that if less time is to be devoted to the process of preparing school leaders for the challenges they will face, the program and curriculum must be carefully and specifically designed to maximize learning during the time provided within the program through a range of research-based training strategies specifically designed for that purpose. This requires a different kind of commitment.

The FEA urges the state to protect the intent of its vision for high-quality non-traditional programs as alternative pathways to school leader certification by requiring the highest possible program standards and review criteria, and an extensive review and approval process, to ensure that all prospective service providers demonstrate both the commitment, the expertise, and the capacity to provide and sustain high-quality non-traditional certification programs for our future school leaders.

Let me be perfectly candid here in saying that this recommendation may appear to be self-serving and an attempt on the part of FEA to prevent approval of other non-traditional programs in the state. But let me assure you that, given the FEA's mission to *support effective school leadership in New Jersey's schools*, the issue for the FEA is not one of preventing competition but rather one of *ensuring program quality—particularly the consistency of program quality across the state*.



## Recommendation #2:

## Post-Graduate Studies Certification Requirement

**Modify the Code so that state certification for supervisor, principal and school administrator will be issued only upon completion of state required programs at the post-graduate level and all state-approved school leader certification programs require a minimum of a master's degree for admission. [Reference N.J.A.C. 6A:9-12.5 (a) 1, 2, 3]**

### Rationale

The FEA strongly believes that the important and challenging role of school leaders demands a highly educated and more experienced individual, and that the state must send a strong message to this effect. The quality of individuals entering the school leader candidate pool will be raised if the state requires that certification for supervisor, principal, and school administrator will be issued only upon completion of state required post-graduate studies, and that all state-approved school leader certification programs require a minimum of a master's degree for admission.

National reports continue to indicate that many individuals who earn their first master's degree in educational administration have very little experience, little or no interest in educational administration, and perceive the master's degree in educational administration as being easier than other fields (i.e. in a content area or educational specialization) and, therefore, an easier path to salary advancement. Anecdotal data from local districts and surveys conducted by state professional associations have provided strong indication that there is not a shortage of individuals who are certified for principal, but rather a shortage of highly qualified individuals who are certified and seriously want the job.

Furthermore, the growth of "fast-track" and "accelerated" school leader preparation programs, many of which have no admission requirements for educational and professional experience beyond a bachelor's degree, have created a situation where individuals with only one year of experience could be certified at the end of a one-year certification program. Local districts have indicated an increasing number of very young and very inexperienced applicants who do not have sufficient experience for school leader positions. Thus, there has been an increase in the quantity of certified people in the candidate pool, but not necessarily the quality.

What we have learned from the NJ EXCEL Program is the importance of recruiting highly educated and well credentialed individuals who have significant depth and breadth of educational experience. NJ EXCEL admissions standards require a minimum of a master's degree and four years of supervisory and/or teaching experience. Since beginning in January 2003, NJ EXCEL has opened the school leader candidate pool to 634 highly qualified candidates who otherwise would not have pursued certification and now be eligible to fill the increasing number of school leader vacancies across the state. Of these 634 candidates: (1) 74% have at least two master's degrees or equivalent, and 8% have doctorates; (2) they average 16 years of educational experience spanning all content areas and specializations, as well as elementary, middle, high school and district-level positions; and (3) 73% have experience as instructional supervisors. These data represent the caliber of professional that we need in the school leader candidate pool.

A decision by the State Board to issue certification for supervisor, principal and school administrator ***only upon completion of state-approved post-graduate programs*** will result not only in improving the quality of the candidate pool for school leaders but will also enhance the knowledge and practice of all educators who will be forced to complete their first master's degree in a content area, curriculum and instruction, and/or an educational specialization, thereby enhancing their efficacy in their current educational roles.



### Recommendation #3:

### Certification of Individuals in Non-Educational Fields

**Clarify the appropriate “recognized leadership and management fields” that would qualify individuals with master’s degrees for principal certification, and require that those who have no P-12 educational experience must complete a state-approved post-graduate program leading to principal certification. [Reference N.J.A.C. 6A:9-12.5 (a) 1 (i)]**

#### Rationale

The proposed Code will allow individuals with a master’s or higher degree in “recognized fields of leadership or management” to obtain principal and school administrator certification as long as they have completed graduate studies aligned with quality components and pass the state-required licensure test. The current Code specifies that eligible individuals must hold a master’s degree in public administration of business. First, the FEA recommends that the Code be explicit in the “recognized fields of leadership or management” that the state considers *most appropriate* to qualify non-educators for school leader certification.

Though there are no quantitative data readily available, it is generally acknowledged that a very small number of individuals from public administration and business fields have been certified and employed as school leaders since these categories were included in the Code in the 1980s. Anecdotal data from state professional organizations indicate that there are a small number of individuals from business and other fields who apply for school leader positions, and that districts are inclined to prefer hiring candidates who have educational experience because of the shift in emphasis from “school managers” to “instructional leaders” and the increasing accountability for student achievement. Districts also express concern for the ability and readiness of individuals from business and other professions who have not been exposed to educational settings to understand and successfully adapt to the unique organizational characteristics of schools, perform effectively, and be retained.

If the state intends to continue to provide the opportunity for individuals from non-educational backgrounds to become certified as school leaders, the FEA strongly recommends that they also be required to gain a sound understanding of the unique organizational characteristics of public education institutions, and sufficient knowledge related to instructional practice and student learning. A knowledge base in these areas is critical for these non-educators to effectively lead schools in their core mission – the continuous improvement of academic achievement for all students. To this end, the FEA urges the State Board to require completion of post-graduate studies in state-approved post-graduate school leader certification programs so that individuals from non-educational professional fields may enhance their qualifications.

If the proposed advanced training is not required, the FEA recommends that the State Board remove these categories from the Code as their inclusion serves no significant purpose in increasing or improving the school leader candidate pool.

On behalf of the Foundation for Educational Administration, I again thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns and recommendations with you today.